



Measuring the Masses: U.S. Census Records, 1850-1900

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OBJECTIVES

- Summarize the history and background of the U.S. federal census
- Describe the genealogical value of the post-1850 census records
- Show how to use census records in your research
- Review methods of finding the records
- Present a case study using post-1850 census records

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

POPULATION SCHEDULES

Content Through the Years

1850-1860	First censuses where every member of the household was listed including age, sex, color, occupation, birthplace, schooling, and literacy details about each.
1870	Added columns for father and/or mother being foreign-born.
1880	First-year the relationship to head of the household was listed as well as marital status.
1890	All but a few portions of this census were destroyed.
1900	Columns with details about parent birth countries and naturalization status. Some years included more employment and military service details.

- Extraction forms: https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Census_Forms
- Enumerator instructions: <https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/measuringamerica.pdf>

NON-POPULATION SCHEDULES

Mortality Schedules

1850 1860	Name of deceased, age at death, sex, color, status (free or enslaved), marital status, birthplace, month of death, occupation, cause of death or disease, and number of days ill.
1870 1880	Family number (as shown on the population schedule), name of deceased, age at death, sex, color, marital status, birthplace, father foreign born, mother foreign born, month of death, occupation, and cause of death or disease.
1885	Colorado, Florida, Nebraska, Dakota, New Mexico only Included those who died in the enumeration district but had no family members in the said district or who died outside the enumeration district with family members located in said district. Name of the deceased, descriptive information including age and gender, marital status, birthplace for both the deceased and the parents of the deceased, occupation, cause of death, length of residence in the county, and the name of the attending physician.

****These only include those who died in the 12 months before the June 1 census day****

- Mortality schedules were taken in 1890 and 1900 but were destroyed.
- Also check the end of state censuses for more local mortality schedules.
- For a detailed list of mortality schedules for what states in each year consult [this document](#) which also includes the NARA publication number.

Slave Schedules

- Exclusive to Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia.
- These schedules did not generally include the name of the enslaved.

1850- 1860	Name of enslaver, age, sex, and color of each enslaved person, fugitive/runaway status, number of manumitted (freed), and number of those "deaf and dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic"
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Agricultural Schedules

1850- 1870	Name of owner/manager, improved and unimproved acreage, number of livestock, amount of agricultural goods produced last year, cash value of the farm, equipment, animals, and home goods.
1880	Added details about acreage devoted to each crop type, number of poultry, and number of eggs produced.

****Not every farm was included in each schedule dependent on production value****

Manufacturing Schedules

1810	Name of owner/manager, improved and unimproved acreage, number of livestock, amount of agricultural goods produced last year, cash value of the farm, equipment, animals, and home goods.
1820 1850 1860	Added details about acreage devoted to each crop type, number of poultry, and number of eggs produced.
1870 1880	Detail increased again, including supplemental schedules for particular industries

****Businesses producing less than \$500 were not included****

Veterans Schedules

1890	Names of surviving soldier/sailor/marines and widows. Included rank, regiment, enlistment, discharge, and length of service as well as their current post office and any disabilities incurred.
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GENEALOGICAL VALUE

- Full names or alternate names of individuals
- Family relationships – directly or indirectly stated
- Birth dates and places
- Number of children, both living and dead
- Marriage information
- Education
- Disease or disability
- Immigration and migration data
- Property ownership
- Occupation
- Veteran status

USING CENSUS RECORDS

- Work backward in time and locate your ancestors in every census for their lifetimes
- Read every column of the census for each member of the household, recording the information in an extraction form.
- Observe the entire neighborhood as family and friends nearby may help answer research questions.
- Look up maps for where your ancestor was living
- Use the details you find to point you toward other records
 - This [FamilySearch Wiki article](#) may help

- Make a timeline and use multiple record types to fill in gaps
- If you are having trouble finding your ancestor:
 - Look for all possible name variations; use the ? and * wildcards
 - Check multiple databases
 - Search for other known family members
 - Browse every page of the census covering their last known residence
 - Search for them in non-population schedules
 - Information can widely and be completely incorrect
 - A woman leaving the household may indicate marriage and a new surname, check marriage records as well

FINDING CENSUS RECORDS

- 1790-1940 US censuses [on FamilySearch.org](#)
- 1790-1940 US censuses [on Ancestry.org](#)
- 1790-1940 US censuses [on MyHeritage](#)
- 1790-1940 US censuses [on Findmypast](#)
- To find non-populations schedules, consult [this FamilySearch Wiki page](#)

FURTHER READINGS

- [20 Tips for Census Research Success](#) by the National Archives
- [Clues in Census Records, 1850-1940](#) by the National Archives
- [Nonpopulation Census Records](#) by the National Archives
- [Native Americans in the Census, 1860-1890](#) by the National Archives
- [Bring Out Your Dead: A Look at Mortality Schedules](#) by Archives.com